

B8592: IMMERSIVE TEAMWORK

August 30–September 1, 2023 [F2] | Kravis 680

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Throughout your career, you'll spend a substantial share of your professional time and effort as a member and/or leader of teams. This course helps you get ready to harness the potential of teams and to thrive as a team member and leader. The course relies heavily on game playing and game (re)design as avenues for understanding team dynamics.

Across the course, you will not be a passive audience member, copying down someone else's generic recipe for team success. Instead, you'll be an active co-creator of your own individualized experience, crafting and refining your personal playbook for what yields great teamwork and deepening your understanding of yourself as a team member and leader. These are our objectives:

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF, including refining answers to questions such as:

- What distinctive things (capabilities, skills, motivations, and so forth) do I, and can I, bring to a team? How can my teams and I get the most from that?
- What do I, and can I, bring out from my teammates (e.g., in terms of attitudes, ideas, effort, etc.)? How can I leverage/refine my impact?
- What do I most/least appreciate and enjoy about teamwork and team leadership? What does that mean for me and my teammates?

UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING TEAMWORK, including refining answers to questions such as:

- What factors are important for team success? What can undermine it?
- What can team leaders do to support team effectiveness?
- How do team dynamics and success factors vary by context, such as task?
- How do functional and occupational differences within a team matter? What implications does that hold?
- How can I enact effective teamwork and team leadership behaviors?

COURSE ACTIVITIES

This half-credit course will take place over two-and-a-half consecutive days. In-person attendance is mandatory. Class sessions will feature some traditional lecture and commentary but most of our time together will be in hands-on team-based experiences, working with groups of classmates on a variety of tasks.

This course relies heavily on games (playing them and re-designing them) as tools for understanding teamwork and oneself. You should be prepared for an intense, hands-on experience, featuring different kinds of tasks (analysis, execution, idea generation, etc.), often under time pressure. There will be repeated episodes for self-reflection as well as giving and receiving candid feedback to/from teammates. Students who give their full attention and energy to this class, and who show a commitment to helping their classmates learn, will be rewarded with new insights into themselves and teamwork.

Our first day will build up to an intense teamwork simulation (a large-scale game) with shifting conditions and time pressure. Team members will scramble to coordinate their actions to achieve a goal, with other teams being potential allies and adversaries. Teammates will occupy different roles (engineer, analyst, diplomat, etc.), receive different information, and experience different dynamics throughout the simulation. As a result, teams and leaders will need to deal with communication and coordination challenges that come from being dispersed and multi-functional (e.g., functional silos).

In the wake of this simulation, students will reflect (individually and in teams) on what worked well and what could have gone better. The whole class will collaborate in an overall debrief, drawing out observations about teamwork, leadership, and communication as well as individual insights (e.g., awareness of one's own style, contributions, impact on others, etc.).

The course then turns on Day 2 to creative teamwork. Teams shift from taking part in a simulation to designing one that others will complete. After an introduction to experiential design and creative teamwork, teams sprint through a design process, generating and selecting ideas, developing and testing materials, and ultimately, on Day 3, showcasing their design (i.e., other classmates taking part in each team's simulation). In the wake of the design sprint and showcase, individuals and teams again reflect on the experience.

Surrounding these immersive team activities are other important elements of the course. In advance of the initial class, students read about real-world team

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dynamics and review of video highlighting a model of team functioning. Prior to class, students also reflect and report on their own experience with teamwork.

In the wake of our in-person class time, students will complete a final assessment of fellow teammates, read additional cases and resources on teamwork, and write brief reflections on them. Students will also take stock of themselves and their experience in the classroom. Building on the feedback and reflections captured during class time, each student will write a paper (due several weeks after class completion) featuring analysis of themselves, reflections on principles of teamwork and leadership, and good practices for their own future reference.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There are three graded areas of the course:

- **ADVANCE WORK** [20% of grade]:
 - Timely and quality completion of the pre-course survey
 - One required reflection paper (following required reading + video)
 - One optional reading reflection paper (on optional reading)
- **DURING CLASS ACTIVITIES** [40% of grade]:
 - Attendance (on-time arrival and presence throughout class periods)
 - Submission of constructive self-reflections and constructive peer feedback throughout the class
 - Teammates' evaluations of each student's contribution to the learning environment
- **POST-CLASS DELIVERABLES** [40% of grade]:
 - Timely and quality completion of the post-course survey, including ratings of teammates
 - One required reading reflection paper (from readings menu)
 - Two optional reflection papers (any combination of reading reflections and course reflections; see notes later in this syllabus)
 - Required final paper featuring self-reflections, observations on team dynamics, and takeaway good practices. See the later section in this syllabus for further details on the final paper.

To earn an "H," you must earn excellent marks in all of the required and optional components of the course, including Advance Work, During Class Activities, and Post-Class Deliverables. Due to the School's grading curve policy, completing all of these assignments is not a guarantee of an "H," but you cannot earn an "H" without completing the optional assignments.

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Students may be able to earn an “HP” with excellent marks in the course’s required components, without submitting optional reading reflection assignments.

In-person attendance in all sessions is mandatory. There is no option to join sessions remotely (e.g., via Zoom) or to make up sessions (e.g., by watching recordings).

CONNECTION TO OTHER COURSES AND THE CORE

This course builds on selected concepts introduced in the core *LEAD* course. While this course features a design activity, it differs from, and complements, other CBS electives that address design (including *Innovate Using Design Thinking* and *Think Bigger*) in that its primary emphasis is not on thoroughly training students in a design process but rather on using a focused design activity as an opportunity to practice and reflect on teamwork. This course also complements ideas addressed in electives such as *Managerial Negotiations*, *Power and Influence*, and *The Leader’s Voice*, giving students additional opportunities to practice relevant behaviors hands-on.

COURSE OUTLINE

The course takes place over two-and-a-half contiguous days (e.g., all day Monday, all day Tuesday, and the first half of Wednesday).

IN ADVANCE

- Pre-course survey, including reflections on self as a team member
- Pre-class **required** reading, video, and reflection paper
- Pre-class **optional** reading and reflection paper

DAY 1 / AUG 30 9:00-5:30

- Introductory comments on team dynamics
- Small-group discussions and team activities
- Large-scale hands-on immersive teamwork activity
- Multiple reflection points, recording self-reflections and peer feedback
- Individual and team reflections on experience; shareouts

DAY 2 / AUG 31 9:00-5:30

- Introduction to creative teamwork and experiential design
- Small-group discussions and team activities
- Extended design challenge: creating an immersive teamwork activity
- Multiple reflection points, recording self-reflections and peer feedback

DAY 3 / SEPT 1 8:30-1:00

- Showcase of student-created immersive teamwork activities
- Reflections and observations
- Wrap-up

POST-CLASS

- Post-class survey
- Additional reflection paper(s)
- Final paper: Insights about teamwork and self, takeaways

PRE-CLASS REQUIRED: READING + VIDEO + REFLECTION PAPER

All components of this assignment (reading + video + paper) are **required**, due to Canvas by **August 28, 5 pm**. In total, this will likely take 1–2 hours. This assignment will significantly boost your learning value from the course, jumpstarting your thinking about teamwork.

1 Complete the following required reading:

Duhigg, Charles. Teams: Psychological Safety at Google and Saturday Night Live, Chapter 2 in *Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business*. Random House, 2016.

Like other readings, this will be available in Canvas under Files | Readings.

2 View the video *The Team Functions Model*

This video provides a brief introduction to the Team Functions model we'll discuss in class. This video will be available in Canvas under Files | Videos.

3 Write and submit a brief reaction paper

The Team Functions model emphasizes Climate as a foundational element of a team's functioning, supporting five additional elements: Communication, Conflict, Creativity, Choice, and Coordination. Duhigg's chapter digs into the importance of psychological safety (a vital part of Climate), examining it in a number of real-world settings. After reviewing the chapter and video, write a reaction paper drawing on your own experience: **How have you seen team Climate affect team functioning, for better and/or for worse?** You are urged to zero-in on how you've seen Climate impact one or more of the other areas highlighted in the Team Functions model (Communication, Conflict, Creativity, Choice, and/or Coordination). Be concrete, ideally providing examples from your own firsthand experience with one or more teams of any kind. Your paper should convey that you've reviewed the video and the Team Functions model. You can describe positive effects (good team functioning) or negative ones (poor functioning) or some mix. Highlight any examples from the Duhigg chapter that fit with your reflections and/or that resonate with you. You are welcome to note observations about how team functioning feeds back into Climate (e.g., strengthening or undermining it). You might also step back and identify any general principles, practices, or challenges reflected in your discussion.

Your paper should be 1.5 to 2 double-spaced pages, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page.

PRE-CLASS OPTIONAL: ADDITIONAL READING REFLECTION PAPER

In addition to the required pre-class assignment (reading + video + paper), you are encouraged to do an additional reading and reflection paper. Completion of this pre-class assignment is necessary to earn an “H.”

For this assignment, read one of the following two chapters:

Catmull, Ed & Wallace, Amy. Establishing Pixar’s Identity. Chapter 4 in *Creativity, Inc: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*. Random House, 2014.

McChrystal, Stanley, Collins, Tantum, Silverman, David & Fussell, Chris. From Command to Team. Chapter 5 in *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*. Penguin Random House, 2015.

It’s your choice which one you’d like to read. See later in this syllabus for brief descriptions of these and other readings. Note that whichever one you don’t read for the optional pre-class reading reflection assignment you would be able to read (and write a reflection on) for a post-class reading reflection.

Reading reflections should be 1-2 double-spaced pages, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page. They should demonstrate an understanding of some key points in the reading but are not meant to be a summary of the reading. **Showcase your own reactions**, such as connecting an idea from the reading to a past situation you’ve encountered or to a future situation you’ll face ... or to another reading or case study. You might write about why you agree or disagree with some claim in the reading, how you might apply some recommendation, and/or discuss boundaries to good practices or implications (e.g., conditions when or where a principle may be more or less true). You’re encouraged to offer any kind of personal reaction.

The optional reading reflection is due to Canvas by **August 28, 5 pm**.

POST-CLASS REFLECTIONS

There are two kinds of post-class reflections: reading reflections and course reflections. Each is described further below in separate sections. These are separate from the final paper.

After the class, you are required to do at least one additional reading from the menu below (or an approved alternative) and submit a reading reflection on it.

To be eligible for an “H,” you must also do two additional reflections, which could include additional reading reflections and/or course reflections (three total, including the required reflection). These two additional reflections are optional, but are required to be eligible for an “H.” For these additional reflections, you can do any combination (2 of one kind, 1 of each) of reading or course reflections that you think will best advance your own learning.

You are also welcome to propose a different approach to a post-course reflection that you think will advance your learning, which could be reflecting on a different reading or report on teamwork (e.g., a book, podcast, interview, etc.). Please contact Professor Ames to describe your proposed alternative. Alternatives will be considered if they serve the learning goals for the course, but should not be pursued for expediency (e.g., writing a reflection on a case you’ve already read for another course).

All post-class reflections (required and optional) are due **September 15, 5 pm**. Note that the final paper has the same deadline. Please pace your work accordingly.

/// POST-CLASS REFLECTIONS: READING REFLECTIONS ///

Reading reflections should be 1-2 double-spaced pages, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page. They should demonstrate an understanding of some key points in the reading but are not meant to be a summary of the reading. **Showcase your own reactions**, such as connecting an idea from the reading to a past situation you’ve encountered or to a future situation you’ll face ... or to another reading or case study. You might write about why you agree or disagree with some claim in the reading, how you might apply some recommendation, and/or discuss boundaries to good practices or implications (e.g., conditions when or where a principle may be more or less true). You’re encouraged to offer any kind of personal reaction. For post-class reflections, you might note connections to your experience in the class.

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Below is a list of possible readings (available in Canvas under Files | Readings). Choose among them according to your interests and your experience in the class and the questions it raised for you. In addition, consider the situations and challenges you'll face in the future—and which readings might help you develop your thinking and readiness in those directions.

If you did not submit a reading reflection on one or either of these pre-class optional readings, they can be part of your post-class reading menu:

- **Catmull, Ed & Wallace, Amy. Establishing Pixar's Identity. Chapter 4 in *Creativity, Inc: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*. Random House, 2014.**

This chapter from a co-founder of Pixar focuses on the animation studio's scramble to produce the sequel Toy Story 2. The experience—including conflicts, firings, and major creative reversals—took a steep psychological and physical toll on the company's people. The company's leadership learned several lessons from the episode, including the notion that a great team can fix (or discard) a mediocre idea but a mediocre team will often screw up even a great idea ... and the importance of caring for team members' welfare.

- **McChrystal, Stanley, Collins, Tantum, Silverman, David & Fussell, Chris. From Command to Team, Chapter 5 in *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*. Penguin Random House, 2015.**

This chapter discusses the value in shifting from a top-down command style to a more fluid, adaptive team process, using examples from airplane crews (including both a tragic crash as well as several cases of life-saving coordination) and the now widely-used aviation practice known as "Crew Resource Management." The authors weave in other examples to illustrate their points about nimble teams that communicate and adapt effectively, ranging from medical doctors to Navy SEALs.

Other readings in the post-class reading menu include:

- **Alliger, George M., Cerasoli, Christopher P., Tannenbaum, Scott I., & Vessey, William B. Team resilience: How teams flourish under pressure. *Organizational Dynamics*, 44, 176–184, 2015**

The researchers writing this article don't showcase an extended case study or example, but instead focus on the general nature of team resilience, a capacity some teams have to sustain performance in challenging environments, from time pressure to crises to lack of resources. They note that a group of resilient individuals doesn't automatically make a resilient team. They describe good practices revealed by their research, including minimizing (mitigating challenges in advance), managing (coping with difficult circumstances), and mending (recovering from challenges, learning from them, sustaining relationships, etc.).

- **Camilleri, Tracey, Rockey, Samantha, and Dunbar, Robin. Bonding. Selection from Chapter 4 from *The Social Brain*. Penguin, 2023.**

Laying groundwork with references to mutual grooming among monkeys and to human physiology (including hormones and neurotransmitters), this selection talks about ways in which groups and teams can effectively bond. The authors discuss synchrony (physical behaviors in tandem with others), shared experiences, eating together—and even singing as a group. It’s not an exhaustive how-to guide, but it might get you thinking about how you can create and sustain a team’s bonds.

- **Connor, Adam and Irizarry, Aaron. Chapters 1 and 4 from *Discussing Design: Improving Communication and Collaboration Through Critique*. O’Reilly, 2015**

Two top user-experience designers with extensive team leadership experience make a powerful case for “critiques,” conversations featuring feedback on a design or solution in light of its goals. Great teams often excel at these discussions; poor ones struggle with having the right conversations at the right times. These chapters offer practical ideas on team processes related to critiques, including pivoting from divergent to convergent thinking, with points relevant to vast range of contexts.

- **Coyle, Daniel. How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups. Chapter 10 in *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*. Bantam, 2018.**

This chapter looks at teamwork from the point of view of Dave Cooper, a Navy SEAL trainer. Cooper’s history of compliance with, and resistance to, his commanders’ orders offers lessons on collective intelligence. This chapter also includes a helpful discussion of After Action Reviews (AARs), team debriefings that set aside hierarchy and extract lessons that the team can use in future operations.

- **Edmondson, Amy C., & Smith, Diane M. Too hot to handle? How to manage relationship conflict. *California Management Review*, 49(1), 6–31, 2006.**

These researchers explore “hot” (unproductive, escalating) team conflict through an anonymized (but real) case study of a senior leadership team. Drawing on the case, the authors call out dysfunctional conflict dynamics, including conflict becoming personal and interrupting effective decision making. They then lay out effective practices for “cool” conflict, including managing self (reflecting and reframing), managing conversations (excavating the logic behind different views), and managing relationships (building trust, investing in key relationships).

- **Hansen, Morten. Getting Collaboration Wrong . . . or Getting It Right. Chapter 1 in Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results. Harvard Business Press, 2009.**

This chapter doesn't focus on the dynamics within small teams but rather examines the connections (or lack thereof) across teams and units within an organization. The dynamics are highlighted by the case of Sony's failure to catch up with Apple's iPod, due in part to Sony's inability (compared to Apple) to collaborate effectively across subunits. Hansen discusses causes of non-collaboration and describes paths to "disciplined collaboration," including removing motivational and ability barriers

- **Rigby, Darrell, Elk, Sarah, & Berez, Steve. How Agile Really Works. Chapter 1 in Doing Agile Right. Harvard Business Review Press, 2020.**

Starting with a composite (fictionalized) case study based on their extensive experience, these consultants illustrate what an "agile" team and process is. Done well, these small, nimble teams can often achieve dramatic and rapid progress on innovation initiatives compared to ordinary operations in large organizations. The authors note some of the history of the approach, growing in part from software development featuring practices such as "scrums" (small, multi-functional, self-led teams that meet frequently and briefly) and sprints of work tied into rapid cycles of prototyping and feedback gathering. Not all teams or organizations are, or need to be, agile, but contemporary leaders are well served to have at least some familiarity with the methods and mindsets involved.

- **Thompson, Leigh. Virtual Teamwork. Chapter 12 in Making the Team. Pearson, 2018.**

Teamwork scholar Leigh Thompson distills research on virtual teams to describe their dynamics and behavior as well as their potential and risks. She reviews good practices for building and operating effective virtual teams.

- **Useem, Michael. Wagner Dodge Retreats in Mann Gulch. Chapter 2 in The Leadership Moment: Nine True Stories of Triumph and Disaster and their Lessons for Us All. Broadway Business, 1998.**

A riveting story of a team tragedy in 1949, when over a dozen "smoke jumper" firefighters died in the Mann Gulch fire. This chapter recounts the fateful decisions that the leader and team members made, with Useem drawing out lessons on topics including communication, receptivity, trust, and stress.

/// POST-CLASS REFLECTIONS: COURSE REFLECTIONS ///

Course reflections are an opportunity to look back and analyze some experience you had in the class, digging deeper into it and drawing out some takeaways. A course reflection (usually zeroing in on one specific episode or point) **should not be redundant or repetitive with your final paper** (which is usually broader and more forward-looking), but it may help shape your thinking about your final paper. A course reflection typically analyzes a critical or pivotal moment or practice in teamwork that you experienced in class (e.g., gathering perspectives from all team members, working through some disagreement, a key decision that went well or poorly, initial team bonding, etc.). It might be an example of great teamwork, or a misstep, but it should yield some insight about team functioning. Your reflection might describe the context and what happened, discuss the consequences and impact, and extract some lesson or larger principle.

Course reflections should be 2–3 double-spaced pages, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page. If you have any questions (e.g., suitable topics, etc.), feel free to contact Professor Ames.

As noted earlier, a course reflection can be submitted as an optional post-class reflection.

To summarize the post-class reflection assignments:

One post-class **reading** reflection is **required** to pass the course. To be eligible for an “H,” two additional reflections are required, which could be any combination of **reading** and/or **course** reflections.

FINAL PAPER

The final paper is a tool for you to synthesize and deepen your understanding of yourself and teamwork ... and to create a resource of good practices that could have value for you in the future. You will presumably draw on your experience in this class in writing this paper. But you are encouraged to go beyond it if doing so will add to the value of this activity for you. Feel free to draw on your experience in MBA groups and teams, feedback you’ve received and other experiences you’ve had at CBS, and your personal and professional life beyond and before Columbia.

You have two options for the paper: a **STANDARD** final paper (5–7 pages long) or an **EXTENDED** final paper (8–10 pages). To be eligible for an “H,” you must

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submit an on-time, high-quality extended final paper. This does not guarantee an H, but is required, along with other requirements noted elsewhere.

All papers should be submitted to Canvas, double-spaced, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page. Please do not add extended padding or spacing around headings, bullet-point lists, etc. The final paper is due **September 15, 5 pm**. Note that the post-class reflections have the same deadline. Please pace your work accordingly.

Regardless of length (standard or extended), all papers should address the following three components:

- **Reflections on self.** Think about yourself as a teammate and a team leader. You might consider things such as what you have learned about your own strengths and style, what you bring to a team and/or what you bring out to others, and what you enjoy most and least about teamwork (and how/why that matters). You might draw on your own **self-reflections** during (and beyond) the course. You might draw on the **peer feedback** you received during team discussions and through the peer feedback survey results. You may also find great value in **talking further** with one or more classmates about the experience and yourselves as team members and leaders. You might also consider how these observations fit with, or depart from, the strengths and weaknesses you identified in the **pre-course survey**.
- **Reflections on teamwork and team leadership.** Beyond yourself, think about what matters to (in)effective teamwork and team leadership. You are welcome, but not obliged, to address some or all of the elements of the Team Functions model, including Core Functions (Climate, Communication, Conflict), Operating Functions (Creativity, Choice, Coordination) as well as inputs (Composition, Context, Compass). You could reflect on what factors matter most (especially for the kinds of situations you may face in your future) and how and why they can help or hurt a team.
- **Takeaways and good practices.** Your paper should also showcase practical implications that can guide you in your future teamwork and leadership. You could use this as a chance to write your own “teamwork manual” or “cheat sheet,” something you might refer back to and get value from in the years ahead. This could include good practices (things to do), pitfalls (things to avoid), principles, processes, commandments, etc. ... whatever could have meaning and value to you.

You have flexibility in how, and at what length, you address these components. Creativity is encouraged. Your paper might end up being 10% reflections on self, 15% reflections on teamwork, and 75% “teamwork manual.” Or it could be 80% reflections on self, including a personal development plan, with 10% on teamwork and 10% on other takeaways. Any combination is allowed, so dig deeper on where you think the value is for you. Other structures are also welcome: the paper does not need to be three separate sections, but could be organized in other ways (e.g., good practices interspersed in the self and teamwork sections). Take an approach that you think is going to have lasting value for you.

If you have questions about the paper, don’t hesitate to ask.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

Assignment	Type	Deadline
Pre-class survey	Required	August 28, 5 pm
Pre-class required reading + video + reflection	Required	August 28, 5 pm
Pre-class optional reading reflection	Optional (required for “H”*)	August 28, 5 pm
Class attendance, including self-reflections and peer feedback	Required	Aug 30 – Sept 1
Post-class survey	Required	August 31, 5 pm
Post-class reading reflection	Required	September 15, 5 pm
Post-class optional reading or course reflection (1 of 2)	Optional (required for “H”*)	September 15, 5 pm
Post-class optional reading or course reflection (2 of 2)	Optional (required for “H”*)	September 15, 5 pm
Final paper	Required (extended format required for “H”*)	September 15, 5 pm

* Selected optional assignments are required to be eligible for an H grade, though do not guarantee an H